

On Wednesday September 27,2000, Robert Neubauer of KPMG Consulting met with Jim McMahon (202-260-8991, jim_mcmahon@ed.gov) of the PELL program regarding use of “Instant Messaging” for a project with which he has been tasked. It turns out that instant messaging is not a specific requirement but an additional functional capability of a service that Jim has found.

The *Recipient Financial Management System (RFMS) Mad Dog Team* was tasked by the SFA Management Council to generate a report on the issues raised by the Schools Channel partners regarding the new RFMS. This new system became operation during June 1999 and complaints regarding its user workload, complexity, and ease of use began to filter in to SFA management soon thereafter.

The *RFMS Mad Dog Team* issued a report on May 19, 2000 and noted possible improvements in three broad categories, service, ease of use, and information correctness. Since the RFMS interfaces with the Postsecondary Education Participants System (PEPS), Grants Administration and Payment System (GAPS), National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS), Central Processing System (CPS), and EdExpress Systems, any delay in any of these systems could unintentionally effect the processing of the RFMS. Also, since each of these systems is run, operated, and maintained by different contractors (ACS, CSC, Rayethon, and NCS) service issues regarding one system may not be forwarded to the correct individuals at any of the interdependent systems or the Customer Service Representative (CSR). Because of this, CSRs are not generally informed of all of the pertinent facts and are unable to correctly answer or are unaware of the issues regarding recipient account status.

SFA operates as a virtual organization since the vast majority of its operations are contracted out to vendors. Even though SFA sees that this reduces the cost of providing their product, inter-vendor communications can sometimes be effected particularly when the information is between channels or between contractors. What further complicates the matter is the fact that these CSRs are not on EdLAN and therefore cannot access the information that is available to SFA employees.

Mr. McMahon believes that an online information exchange tool would assist SFA in providing top-notch customer service. This tool would need to perform the following functions;

- Calendar Scheduling
- Document Storage and Retrieval
- Discussions via Newsgroups

Mr. McMahon has found a tool that meets these requirements, Intranets.com. Intranets.com meets and exceeds the functional requirements noted above. Mr. McMahon has conveyed this to SFA IT Security however they have noted the security and privacy aspect of two additional functions, email and instant messaging. The email functionality can be disabled by the administrator and in regards to instant messaging, Intranets.com uses the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) protocol that is known to have

vulnerabilities. Also, IRC is explicitly prohibited by SFA policy. It is possible to implement a chat session via http and web pages using javascript.

It is possible for SFA to wait until the modernization partner addresses these issues or to attempt to meet the planned benefit date of May 2001 for the top-notch service described by the RFMS Mad Dog Final Report. By moving forward now, the specific requirements must be addressed. If SFA moves forward on this issue, they would have to address policy, security, confidentiality, integrity, and availability issues of any vendor's implementation.